

Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

‘Allāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī

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Volume 37
First Edition (2023)

Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd.
Sydney, Australia
www.tawheed.com.au

Chapter 55

Sūrah al-Raḥmān ('The Beneficent')

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

Verses 1–29

This chapter of the Qur'an calls the audience's attention to God's creation in all of its parts—the heavens and the earth, the land and the sea, the humans and the jinn—and the arrangement of these parts in such a way that the two species of humans and jinn benefit from them in their lives. In this way, the cosmos is divided into two stages of creation (*nash'atān*): The creation of this world (*nash'a dunyā*), which will pass away along with its inhabitants, and the creation of the next world (*nash'a ukhrā*), which will endure, and in which felicity will be utterly distinct from misery, and blessings from afflictions.

On this basis, it is apparent that the cosmos—in both its this-worldly and next-worldly aspects—is governed by a single order that unifies its parts and brings together its components, and that this order rests on firm and mutually-supporting foundations, such that each part complements and completes the other.

So, all that this world contains, in both its causes and its effects, are the blessings and bounties of God, and for this reason, this chapter of the Qur'an repeatedly poses a question mixed with a rebuke, namely: 'Which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?' This question is repeated a total of thirty-one times in this chapter.

This is why the chapter begins by invoking God with the attribute of His universal and all-encompassing mercy (*rahma*), which envelops the believer and the disbeliever in this world and the next world without discrimination¹,

¹ The name *al-Raḥmān* encompasses not only the worldly blessings received by both believers and disbelievers, but also the blessings exclusive to the believers in the hereafter. (Auth.)

and concludes by celebrating His praise with the words: *Blessed is the name of your Lord, the Lord of majesty and honour!*

This chapter could be either Meccan or Medinan in its revelation, although it is closest to the Meccan chapters in style. It is also the only chapter of the Qur'an to open with one of the divine names immediately after the *bismillāh*. In *Majma' al-Bayān*, it is narrated from Imām Mūsā b. Ja'far, from his forefathers, from the Prophet, who said: 'Everything has its bride, and the bride of the Qur'an is Sūrah al-Raḥmān!' And the same tradition is narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from al-Bayhaqī, from 'Alī, from the Prophet.

الرَّحْمَنُ ۝ عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ ۝

(55:1–2) *The All-beneficent has taught the Qur'an.*

As has already been discussed in the explanation of Sūrah al-Fātiḥa, the divine name 'the All-beneficent' (*al-Raḥmān*) is a noun in the hyperbolic form (*ṣiḡhat al-mubālagha*)—a form which intensifies the meaning of its etymological root. In this case, *al-Raḥmān* signifies an abundance of mercy (*rahma*) through the generous giving of blessings. As such, this name encompasses not only the worldly blessings received by both believers and disbelievers, but also the blessings exclusive to the believers in the hereafter. It is this divine name's universality that makes it fitting to invoke at the outset of the present chapter of the Qur'an, as this chapter focuses on expounding the various blessings which God bestows on His creatures in this world and the next and by which the worlds of the two species of men and jinn are given order and direction.

Scholars have said that the name *al-Raḥmān* is one of God's exclusive names, meaning that it cannot be applied to any other being. This contrasts with other names such as *al-Raḥīm* ('Most-merciful') or *al-Rāḥim* ('Merciful'), which can be used for others.

God begins the enumeration of His blessings with '*has taught the Qur'an*' because the Qur'an is the greatest of His blessings in terms of both its magnitude and importance, and it is the loftiest of them in status; it is the direct speech of God, which points to the straight path and contains a clear explanation of the way that leads to felicity. In short, it represents the highest ambition that anyone might hope for and the utmost desire that anyone might ask for. That is why the teaching of the Qur'an is mentioned before all the other blessings listed in this chapter, even before the creation of the jinn and humankind, for whose benefit and education the Qur'an was ultimately revealed.

Notice that the verse does not explicitly mention who is being taught the

Qur'an, namely 'humankind' or 'humankind and the jinn.' So, the full meaning of the verse could be either '...taught humankind the Qur'an' or '...taught humankind and the jinn the Qur'an.' And although the Qur'an's commentators have not discussed the second of these possibilities, the latter appears to be the more likely of the two. This is by virtue of the fact that the present chapter of the Qur'an addresses humankind and the jinn together through the use of the dual form in all of its verses. If the verse '...taught the Qur'an' meant only 'to humankind,' then it would not be correct to mention it as a blessing to both the jinn and humankind through the use of this duality.

Some have said that this verse means God taught Prophet Muḥammad or Gabriel the Qur'an, but the most appropriate reading is the one presented above.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ ۖ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(55:3–4) *He created man, taught him articulate speech.*

God mentions the creation of the human being here, and He will explain a particular aspect of this creation in a subsequent verse: *He created man out of dry clay, like the potter's*. The human being is one of God's most wondrous creations, or in fact the most wondrous of them all, as is apparent when we compare his existence to the existence of other creatures and consider how the path to perfection has been laid out for him in his outward and inward aspects and in his worldly and next-worldly lives. God says: *We certainly created man in the best of forms; then We relegated him to the lowest of the low, except those who have faith and do righteous deeds* (95:4–6).

When God says: *taught him articulate speech* (bayān), the term *bayān* literally means 'to uncover something,' and here it denotes the power to uncover what is in one's own mind. This is one of the most profound of God's blessings, and the fact that God taught this to the human being demonstrates the great care that God has for humanity.

Now, speech does not mean merely the process of bringing a sound into being using the lungs, trachea, and throat, nor even the variety of sounds that can be produced in the throat through the use of the various articulation points found in the mouth. On the contrary, the human being, having been granted innate inspiration by God, can take one of the sounds produced by one of these articulation points in their mouth—which is called a letter—or combine several of these letters and make them into a sign that refers to a particular concept, which represents something that is absent from the listener's

senses or perception. In doing so, the speaker can summon to the mind of the listener any object in the visible world, no matter how great or how miniscule, whether or not it exists, and whether it is in the future or the past. More than that, the speaker can summon to the listener's mind intangible ideas which cannot be perceived by sense but which the human being reaches through contemplation. And, having summoned all of this to the listener's mind, the speaker can present it to their senses as though the thing itself was there.

The human being could not function in civil society, nor could they have made such astounding progress in their life without being aware of the nature of speech and using it to open the doors of communication with and understanding of one another. Were it not for speech, there would be no difference between the human being and mute beasts—their life would be equally stagnant and monotonous.

The strongest argument for the fact that human beings were guided innately to develop articulate speech is the fact that different nations and peoples developed different languages according to their own spiritual qualities, dispositions of character, and according to the different natural regions in which they lived. God says: *'Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors'* (30:22).

When God says: 'taught him articulate speech,' He does not mean that God created all human languages and then taught them to humankind by revealing them to one of His prophets or by directly inspiring human beings with this knowledge. On the contrary, it is the fact that the human beings finds themselves enmeshed in society that naturally motivates them to develop methods of communication and understanding in the form of the signs and sounds, which we call speech or expression, and without which social and political life would be impossible.

When God acts, it is through creation and origination. However, the association of an utterance with its meaning in spoken language is a matter of social convention rather than of objective reality. Hence, God created the human being and endowed them with an innate nature (*fiṭra*) that predisposed them towards living in a society and developing language through the association of words with meanings such that if the word is presented to a listener, it is as though they have been given the meaning itself. Then, He disposed them to create written symbols whose specific shapes denoted words, such that writing was complementary to the purposes of speech and writing represented speech in the same way as speech represented meaning. It is through endowing humankind with this innate capacity that He can be said to have

given them the gift of speech.

In short, the power of articulate speech is one of the greatest divine blessings and bounties given to humankind; for it preserves the humanity of the human species and guides them towards every good thing.

This is the apparent meaning that comes to mind from these two verses, but commentators on the Qur'an have offered other opinions as well. For example, some say that '*man*' in this verse refers to Adam and '*articulate speech*' refers to the names that God taught to him. Others say that '*man*' refers to the Prophet Muḥammad and '*articulate speech*' refers to the Qur'an, or to his teaching the Qur'an to the believers. Some say that '*articulate speech*' refers to good and evil, which were taught to the human being. Others say that '*articulate speech*' refers to the way of guidance and the way of error. There are other opinions still, all of which, however, are far from the apparent meaning of the verse.

الشمس والقمر بحسبان ﴿٥﴾

(55:5) *The sun and the moon by calculation*

'Calculation' (*ḥisāb*) is a verbal noun, which has the same meaning as *ḥisāb* ('accounting'). The sentence's subject is 'the sun,' to which 'the moon' is joined by conjunction. Then, 'by calculation' is the predicate of the sentence. The whole sentence 'The sun and the moon by calculation' is itself a predicate for 'The All-beneficent,' above. The meaning of the sentence is that the sun and the moon 'run' by calculation, as God has disposed them to move through the sky.

والنجم والشجر يسجدان ﴿٦﴾

(55:6) *and the herb and the tree prostrate*

Scholars have said the word 'herb' (*najm*) refers to plants that sprout up from the ground without any trunk, while the word 'tree' refers to plants with a trunk. This is a good interpretation, which is supported by the fact that the word '*najm*' (which can also mean 'star') is associated with the word 'tree' here. However, the fact that the preceding verse invokes the sun and the moon may suggest that the intended meaning is the celestial body rather than the variety of plant.

When the Qur'an says that the herb and the tree 'prostrate,' this signifies their obedience to the divine command to grow and flourish according

to what has been determined for them, as some have said. However, a more precise understanding is that they strike out beneath the ground with their roots and veins to obtain the minerals and water that they need to sustain themselves. This spreading out through the ground is actually a manifestation of their innate need for a source that will suffice their needs—and, in reality, it is none other than God who nurtures them—and, therefore, this is a form of prostration to God.

Regarding the grammatical construction of the verse *‘and the herb and the tree prostrate,’* the particle ‘and’ joins it to the previous verse, and its structure resemble that verse as well: ‘The herb’ is the subject of the sentence, ‘the tree’ is joined to it by conjunction, and the predicate of the sentence is the verb ‘prostrate.’ Its meaning is: ‘And the herb and the tree prostrate to Him.’

In *al-Kashshāf*, we read: ‘If one were to ask: “How are these two sentences joined to ‘The All-beneficent,’ meaning everything between ‘The sun...’ and ‘...prostrate?’” I would say: “The obvious semantic connection between the two passages obviates any need for a literal one, as it is evident that the ‘calculation’ is God’s calculation and that they ‘prostrate’ to God rather than to anyone else!”’

And as for the question of why there are no connectives used between the previous verses: *‘He created man, taught him articulate speech, the sun and the moon by calculation,’* al-Zamakhsharī says that this is because God wishes to count out each of these points individually to reprimand those who deny the All-beneficent and His bounties. This is in the same way as one might, for example, reproach one who is ungrateful to their benefactor by saying: ‘Zayd helped you out of poverty, restored your dignity, and ensured you had plenty. He did for you what no person would do for another, so how can you show him such ingratitude?’

Having delivered this reproach, God returns to the usual manner of speaking; linking things together with connectives as befits them because of their association and proximity to one another. Now, He says: *‘And the herb and the tree prostrate, and He raised the sky....’*

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ ﴿٧﴾

(55:7) *He raised the sky and set up the balance*

If by ‘sky’ (*samā*), God means the upward direction, then He raised it by creating it high up, rather than raising it after it had been created. On the other hand, if He means the celestial bodies that exist above us, then He raised

them in the sense that he appointed them to a place that was high in relation to the earth by separating them after they had previously been joined, as He says elsewhere in the *Have the faithless not regarded that the heavens and the earth were interwoven and We unravelled them* (21:30). In both cases, however, ‘raised’ is used in the physical sense.

On the other hand, if by ‘sky’ God meant the place which contains the stations of the heavenly angels and the origin of divine commands and revelation, then ‘raised’ is used in the spiritual sense or in a sense that combines the physical sense with the spiritual one.

Some have said that ‘the balance’ (*mīzān*) refers to the balance of justice, meaning ‘God has set up justice between you that you might maintain equality by giving each person their due.’

Others have said ‘the balance’ refers to the tool by which the weights of different things might be measured. However, the first meaning is broader and more comprehensive in its scope.

أَلَّا تَظْغَعُوا فِي الْمِيزَانِ ۖ وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ ۝٩

(55:8–9) Do not infringe the balance! Maintain the weights with justice, and do not shorten the balance!

The apparent meaning of ‘the balance’ is the common weighing scale. Assuming that the balance mentioned in the previous verse is indeed this common weighing scale, then the admonition in this verse ‘Do not infringe...!’ explains what it means for Him to have ‘set up’ the balance. In short: “We have set up the balance between you” means that you should do justice when measuring weights and not deprive other people of their rights.’

On the other hand, if we were to assume that the balance refers to any method of determining someone’s rights or to the ideal of justice in general, then the admonition ‘Do not infringe...!’ represents a particular rule derived from a general principle. In which case, this verse means: ‘The fact that we have established a measure of rights and the ideal of justice between you means that you should measure weights fairly and not deprive people of their rights when doing so.’

In any case, the apparent construction of the verse is that the Arabic particle *an* in the phrase ‘Do not infringe...’ (*allā tatghaw*)¹ is intended to signify an explanation, while *lā tatghaw* is a prohibition of infringing against the

1 Where *allā* is formed from *an* + *lā*.

balance. Then, *Maintain the weights with justice* is an imperative command that is joined to this prohibition, where *qist* ('justice') means the same as '*adl*'. After this, *and do not shorten the balance!* is a second prohibition that explains what God meant by *infringe the balance* and places additional emphasis upon it. 'To shorten the balance' means to interfere with it so that either the buyer or the seller to lose out on their rightful due.

If, on the other hand, we read the verse such that *the balance* is accusative (*nāsiba*) and *not infringe* is a negation rather than a prohibition, the meaning would become: 'So that you do not infringe the balance.' However, this would require some intellectual gymnastics to explain how an imperative sentence could be linked to a declarative one when we come to *And maintain the weights....*

وَالْأَرْضَ وَضَعَهَا لِلْأَنَامِ ﴿١٠﴾

(55:10) *And the earth, He laid it out for humankind (anām).*

There is a debate about whether the word *anām* here actually denotes 'humankind,' 'humankind and the jinn,' or 'every kind of creature that crawls upon the land.' Note also the deft use of the verb 'laid out' (*wadʿ*) for the earth in this verse, which contrasts nicely with the use of 'raising' (*rafʿ*) for the sky in the previous one.

فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَالتَّخْلُ ذَاتُ الْأَكْمَامِ ﴿١١﴾

(55:11) *In it are fruits and date palms with sheaths,*

The Arabic word *fākiha* (translated as 'fruits') denotes all kinds of fruit aside from dates. Meanwhile '*akmām*' (translated as 'sheaths') is the plural of *kumm* (also spelled *kimm*) and refers to the coverings of the date bunches. On the other hand, *kumm* in the sense of a garment is never spelled *kimm*, according to what others have said.

وَالْحَبُّ ذُو الْعَصْفِ وَالرَّيْحَانُ ﴿١٢﴾

(55:12) *Grains with husks, and fragrant herbs.*

This verse is joined to '*fruits...*' in the previous verse, meaning 'And in it are grains with husks, and fragrant herbs.' Grains (*ḥabb*) are the part of the crop that is eaten, such as grain, barley, rice, and so on, while the husks (*ʿasf*) are the part that covers the exterior of those grains. Some have interpreted '*ʿasf*

to mean the leaves of crops generally, or the leaves of dried-up crops, while *rayḥān* (‘fragrant herbs’) refers to pleasant-smelling herbs.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٣﴾

(55:13) So which of your Lord’s bounties will you both deny?

Alā’ (translated as ‘bounties’) is the plural of *ilan*, meaning ‘blessing.’

This verse is directed to the entirety of the two species of humans and jinn, as can be seen from the fact that subsequent verses address them directly: ‘We shall soon make Ourselves unoccupied for you, O you two weighty ones (*thaqalān*)!’ (55:31); ‘O company of jinn and humans...!’ (55:33); and ‘There will be unleashed upon you a flash of fire...’ (55:35). Therefore, it cannot be argued that the ‘both of you’ in this verse is addressed to the male and female of humankind. Neither can it be claimed that it is using the dual to address an individual and that the use of dual signifies emphasis, as it is used in the Arabic sentence *idribā ‘unuqah* (lit. ‘Strike both of you his neck’) to signify a repetition of the command (i.e. ‘Strike his neck! Strike his neck!’).

The reason why the only valid interpretation of the dual in this chapter of the Qur’an is that it is being addressed to humankind and the jinn jointly is because, as we shall discuss below, it counts the tribulations of the Day of Resurrection and the punishment of the wrongdoers as instances of God’s blessings. Sending the sinners to be requited with the consequences of their deeds and dispatching the wretched to the fate that befits their wretchedness are part of the proper functioning of the universal order that governs over all the denizens of the cosmos. Therefore, this is a blessing in relation to the whole, even if it represents a curse for a specific part thereof—namely the wrongdoers. This is no different to the way in which customs and laws apply in human societies, where the use of coercive measures against unjust and corrupt persons is necessary for the wellbeing of society as a whole and its survival. It is not merely beneficial for righteous persons, but for everyone, and the same is true for righteous persons being recompensed with beautiful praise and divine rewards.

So, both the punishment and chastisement that hell has for its inmates and the blessings and rewards that paradise contains are a blessing and a boon from God for all human and jinn-kind. This is in the same way that the sun, the moon, the raised sky, the outspread earth, the herb, the tree, and other phenomena are blessings and boons for all the inhabitants of this world.

From these verses, it also becomes apparent that the jinn, as a whole,

benefit from the blessings enumerated in these verses just as humans do. Were this not the case, after all, it would not have befitted God to rebuke them jointly with humankind.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلْصَالٍ كَالْفَخَّارِ ﴿١٤﴾

(55:14) *He created man out of dry clay, like the potter's*

‘Dry clay’ (*ṣalṣāl*) refers to clay that has dried out and hardened so that it makes a clinking sound when trodden upon.

In this verse, when God says ‘man’ (*insān*), He means the human species, and when He says He created him ‘out of dry clay, like the potter’s,’ He means that the created form of the human being will eventually become that.

Some have said that by ‘man’ God means Adam, the first human being.

وَخَلَقَ الْجَانَّ مِنْ مَّارِجٍ مِنْ نَارٍ ﴿١٥﴾

(55:15) *and created the jinn out of a flame of a fire.*

A ‘flame’ (*mārij*) means a pure spark of fire—although some say it means fire mixed with soot—and the meaning of this with regards to the jinn is the same as that of clay with regards to the human being, so ‘jinn’ refers to the species of the jinn as a whole, and they are created from fire because that is what their created form will eventually become.

Some have also said that ‘jinn’ here refers to the first of the jinn.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٦﴾

(55:16) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقَيْنِ وَرَبُّ الْمَغْرِبَيْنِ ﴿١٧﴾

(55:17) *Lord of the two easts, and Lord of the two wests!*

The meaning of ‘two easts’ (*mashriqayn*) is the place of sunrise in the winter and its place in the summer, by which the changing of the seasons takes place and the provision of sustenance for God’s creatures is arranged.

Some have said the ‘two easts’ refers to the rising points of the sun and the moon, while the ‘two wests’ are their respective setting points.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٨﴾

(55:18) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ ﴿١٩﴾ بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخٌ لَا يَبْغِيَانِ ﴿٢٠﴾

(55:19–20) *He merged the two seas, meeting each other. There is a barrier between them which they do not overstep.*

Maraja (translated as ‘He merged’) can either mean that He mixed the seas, or that He sent them. However, the first meaning is closer to the apparent meaning of the verse. And it appears that ‘the two seas’ refers to fresh water and to salt water, as in the verse: *Not alike are the two seas: this one sweet and agreeable, pleasant to drink, and that one briny and bitter, and from each you eat fresh meat and obtain ornaments which you wear* (35:12).

The most acceptable reading that has been proposed with regards to ‘the two seas’ is that they do not refer to any two specific seas, but to two types of sea: Salt water, which covers approximately three-quarters of the earth’s surface—this includes oceans and other seas—and fresh water, which is stored in underground reservoirs and comes to the surface via springs before flowing out to sea in great rivers. These two kinds of water are continuously meeting one another, but between them is a barrier, both in the physical form of underground reservoirs and in the non-physical form that prevents saltwater from mixing directly with fresh water and thereby contaminating it and ending life, while also preventing fresh water from flooding the oceans and making them fresh water also and thereby removing the benefits of their saltiness, such as purifying the air and so on.

The seas continue to replenish freshwater sources in the form of rainwater, which is carried from the seas in the form of clouds inland before raining down and being stored in the reservoirs of the earth. At the same time, fresh water continues to replenish the seas through rivers flowing out into them.

Therefore, the meaning of these two verses—and God knows best—is that God has merged the two seas of salt water and fresh water in that they are in constant contact while between them there exists a barrier which neither can overstep, such that one could overwhelm the other, remove its saltiness or freshness, and thereby destroy the natural order that sustains life in this world.

فَبَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢١﴾

(55:21) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

يَخْرُجُ مِنْهُمَا اللُّؤْلُؤُ وَالْمَرْجَانُ ﴿٢٢﴾

(55:22) *From them emerge the pearl and the coral.*

Meaning from the two seas of fresh and salty water both, and these are one of the many benefits that their combined existence provides to human beings. See also our commentary on the verse: *Not alike are the two seas...* (35:12).

فَبَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٣﴾

(55:23) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

وَلَهُ الْجَوَارِ الْمُنشَآتُ فِي الْبَحْرِ كَالْأَعْلَامِ ﴿٢٤﴾

(55:24) *His are the ships sailing on the sea like landmarks.*

‘Ships’ is a translation of *jawārī* (the plural of *jāriya*); ‘sailing’ is a translation of *munsha’āt*, the passive participle of *inshā’*, which means to bring forth and nurture something; and ‘landmarks’ are the translation of *a’lām*, meaning ‘mountains.’

This verse asserts God’s ownership of ships, even though these are man-made objects, because the material causes of their existence—wood, metal, and other components—and the human who assembles them—along with their senses, their mind, and their will—are all ultimately created by God and, therefore, belong to Him. Hence, whatever these creations produce belongs to God as well.

God has blessed the human being by inspiring them with the knowledge of how to manufacture things, the benefits that flow from them, and how to make the most of these benefits.

فَبَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٥﴾

(55:25) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٢٧﴾

(55:26–27) *Everyone on it is ephemeral, yet lasting is the Face of your Lord, majestic and munificent.*

‘On it’ means ‘on the earth.’ In other words, every sentient and thinking being upon the earth will perish. This verse consigns all of humankind and the jinn to extinction and oblivion.

This verse uses the expression ‘everyone’ (*kullu man*), which denotes every thinking creature, rather than ‘everything’ (*kullu mā*) because the purpose of this chapter of the Qur’an is to enumerate the boons and blessings that God has provided to humankind and the jinn in their this-worldly and next-worldly existences.

The apparent meaning of the word *fānin* (translated as ‘ephemeral’) is that it refers to the future, as can also be gleaned from its context. This suggests that *Everyone on it is ephemeral* alludes to the fact this worldly creation will come to an end with the extinction of those who dwell within it, namely the jinn and humankind. A new creation will then be inaugurated for them, and both the extinction of this worldly creation and the dawning of the new creation of recompense upon them are counted amongst God’s boons and blessings. This is because the life of this world is intended as a preliminary step towards the goal of the hereafter; and moving from a preliminary step to its ultimate goal is the highest form of blessing conceivable.

This is the answer to someone who asks: ‘How can the passing away of everything this world be considered a blessing?’ It is because the reality of this passing away is returning to God by leaving this world behind, as numerous verses of the Qur’an explain. ‘Ephemeral’ is not used here in the sense of undergoing total annihilation.

As for when God says: *yet lasting is the face of your Lord*, the face (*wajh*) of a thing is the aspect of itself with which it turns towards another and directs its attention to them. In the case of God Almighty, His Face refers to His noble attributes, which serve as intermediaries between Himself and His creation, through which He sends down the blessings of His creation and guidance upon them. Examples of these attributes include His knowledge, power, hearing, seeing, mercy, forgiveness, and provision. See our commentary on Sūrah al-A‘rāf for the full discussion of how the divine names and divine attributes act as intermediaries between God and His creation.

As for His saying: *majestic and munificent*, the term ‘majesty’ (*jalāl*) is suggestive of spiritual elevation and superiority over others. This befits divine attributes that convey a sense of imperiousness and authority, such as exaltation, transcendence, greatness, grandeur, pride, encompassing, might, and overpowering.

By contrast, ‘munificence’ (*ikrām*) suggests magnificence and splendor that attract others and astound them. This befits divine attributes such as knowledge, power, life, mercy, generosity, beauty, splendor, and the like. These are commonly called ‘the attributes of beauty’ (*ṣifāt al-jamāl*), while the former category of attributes are often known as ‘the attributes of majesty’ (*ṣifāt al-jalāl*). The divine names are also categorized into beautiful and majestic names according to which of these attributes they reflect.

Hence, ‘majestic and munificent’ (*dhū al-jalāl wa al-ikrām*) is one of the divine names that unites in its meaning both the names of beauty and the names of majesty. And the real entity to which this name refers is none other than the divine essence (*dhāt*), as indicated by the final verse of this chapter, *Blessed is the name of your Lord, the Lord of majesty and honour!*

However, the present verse—*yet lasting is the face of your Lord, majestic and munificent*—focuses on God’s face. This is for one of two reasons: First, because the phrase *majestic and munificent* is not intended to be read as an adjective for *face* but is rather intended as praise for *your Lord*. In other words, it is to be read as *yet lasting is the face of your Lord*, and He is *majestic and munificent*. Second, because what is meant by ‘face’ here—as we have already said—is God’s attribute of munificence and the divine name associated with it, and to apply one divine name to another divine name is no different from applying that divine name to the divine essence itself.

If ‘face’ is understood to mean the aspect of a thing with which it turns itself toward another—meaning a divine name—then it is self-evident that the subsistence in objective reality of a name is subsidiary to the subsistence in objective reality of the thing it names. Based on this principle, the verse would mean: ‘But lasting is your Lord with His majesty and munificence, and He will not be affected by their passing in the least, nor will He be changed by it.’

On the other hand, if ‘face’ is understood to mean the means by which something directs its attention towards another, this would refer to everything that is attributed to Him and whatever He turns His attention towards, such as His prophets, His representatives, His religion, His reward, proximity to Him, and other things like this. In which case, the verse would mean: ‘Whatever is with God will survive the extinction of the inhabitants of this world, namely

that which is in His proximity, such as the various kinds of divine recompense, reward, and nearness to Him.’ God says: *That which is with you will be spent but what is with God shall last* (16:96).

Our commentary on the verse *Everything is to perish except His Face*. (28:88) contains other useful points in this regard.

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فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٨﴾

(55:28) So which of your Lord’s bounties will you both deny?

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

يَسْأَلُهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ ﴿٢٩﴾

(55:29) Everyone in the heavens and the earth asks Him. Every day He is engaged in some work.

Their asking him is the asking of their innate neediness, for they are in need of Him from every aspect of their being; their existence is utterly contingent upon Him, and they cling to the skirt of the richness of His being. God says: *You are the ones who stand in need of God, and God He is the All-sufficient* (35:15), and the verb ‘ask’ appears in the same sense in the verse *and He gave you all that you had asked Him* (14:34).

As for His saying: *Every day He is engaged in some work*, the word ‘some work’ (*sha’nin*) is kept indefinite to emphasise the variety and diversity of this work. Thus, it means that at every moment, God is engaged in some work that is different to what came before it and what will come after it. He does not perform any action He takes more than once, nor does any work He undertakes resemble any other work He has undertaken from any angle. He only acts without prior example, and the term for this is *ibdā’* (origination). That is why God describes Himself as: *The originator of the heavens and the earth* (2:117).

The verse says ‘every day’ to show that God’s agency and His direction of things is all-encompassing; He is present at every time, but He is never contained by time; He is present in every place, but He is never contained by place; He is with everything, but He does not approach anything.

Examining Narrations

- (1) In *al-Kāfi*, Muḥammad ibn al-Munkadir narrates from Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh: ‘When God’s Messenger recited *al-Raḥmān* to people, they fell silent and did not say anything. So, God’s Messenger told

them: “The jinn gave a better response than you when I recited to them ‘*So which of your Lord’s bounties will you both deny?*’” (55:13) They said: “No, we will not deny any of our Lord’s bounties!”

Author’s comments: A tradition with a similar meaning is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from the compilers of a number of *ḥadīth* collections, and it is declared an authentic narration from Ibn ‘Umar, from the Prophet.

- (2) In *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, via a chain of narrators to (Imām) al-Riḍā: ‘One of the things about which the Syrian man asked ‘Alī was the name of the first jinn. He said: “Shu’mān, and he was the one created ‘*out of a flame of a fire*’ (55:15).”’
- (3) In *al-Iḥtijāj* a tradition is narrated from (Imām) ‘Alī, which he says: ‘As for the verse “*Lord of the two easts, and Lord of the two wests,*” (55:17) the sun rises in winter in one place and in summer in another. Do you not know this from the sun’s getting nearer and farther away?’

Author’s comments: A tradition with the same meaning is narrated in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* with an incomplete chain of narrators.

- (4) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Ibn ‘Abbās: Regarding the verse: ‘*He merged the two seas, meeting each other,*’ (55:19) he said: “Alī and Fāṭima.’ Regarding: ‘*There is a barrier between them which they do not overstep,*’ (55:20) he said: ‘The Prophet.’ Regarding: ‘*From them emerge the pearl and the coral,*’ (55:22) he said: ‘al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.’

Author’s comments: Ibn Mardawayh also narrates something similar from Anas b. Mālīk. This is also narrated in *Majma‘ al-bayān* from Salmān al-Fārsī, Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, and Sufiyyān al-Thawrī. And this is an esoteric interpretation of the verse.

- (5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse: ‘*Everyone on it is ephemeral,*’ (55:26) he says: ‘Whoever is on the face of the earth,’ and concerning: ‘*yet lasting is the face of your Lord,*’ (55:27) he says: ‘The religion of your Lord. And (Imām) ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn said: “We are the face through which God dispenses blessings to His creatures.”’
- (6) In the *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, concerning the verse: ‘*yet lasting is the face of your Lord,*’ it is narrated from (Imām) al-Ṣādiq: ‘We are the face of God.’

Author’s comments: There are narrations in addition to the two above that have the same meaning, and we have already explained how the term ‘face’ (*wajh*) can refer to either the religion (*dīn*) or the Imām.

- (7) In *al-Kāfī*, there is a sermon of ‘Alī’s which reads: ‘Praise belongs to God who never dies and whose wonders never cease, for He is in every day engaged in some work of originating some amazing thing that did not previously exist.’
- (8) And in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* concerning the same verse (55:29), we read: ‘He gives life and causes death, increases and decreases.’
- (9) In *Majma‘ al-bayān*, it is narrated from Abī Dardā, from the Prophet concerning the verse ‘*Every day He is engaged in some work*’ (55:29): ‘Part of His work is to forgive sins and relieve sorrows, and to lift up some nations and humble others.’

Author’s comments: This is also narrated from him in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, and a narration with the same meaning is narrated from Ibn ‘Umar from the Prophet, but it reads instead: ‘...to forgive sins and to alleviate burdens.’

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Verses 30–78

This is the second part of the chapter, whose verses describe the second creation (*nash'a*) of the jinn and humankind—which is the creation in which they return to God and are recompensed for their deeds—and enumerate God's bounties to them therein. This is just as the first part of the chapter described the original creation and enumerated God's bounties to them therein.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٠﴾

(55:30) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

سَنَفْرُغُ لَكُمْ أَيُّهَ الثَّقَلَانِ ﴿٣١﴾

(55:31) *We shall soon make Ourselves unoccupied for you, O you notable two!*

‘To make someone unoccupied for a matter’ (*farāgh*) means that a person was occupied with other matters previously, but they put them to one side to devote their full attention to this new matter because of its importance.

Therefore, *We shall soon make Ourselves unoccupied for you*, means that We shall soon wrap up the matter of the original creation and devote Our attention to you. The following verses make clear that this refers to their resurrection, their judgement, and the recompense for their deeds, whether good or evil. Therefore, ‘*make Ourselves unoccupied for you*’ alludes to the transformation of the world for a new creation.

However, God making Himself ‘unoccupied’ for the jinn and humankind does not contradict the principle that God is not distracted from one thing by another (*lā yashghaluhu sha'nun 'an sha'nin*). This is because the phrase ‘*make Ourselves unoccupied*’ is with regard to the changing of one creation for another, whereas the principle that God is not distracted from one thing by another is with regard to God's omnipotence and omnipresence. This is akin to the fact that the description of God as ‘*every day*’ being ‘*engaged in some work*’ (55:29) is with regard to the variety of work and, as such, does not contradict the principle that God is not distracted from one thing by another.

‘You notable two’ (*al-thaqalān*) refers to the jinn and humankind, while the instances of the second-person plural pronoun ‘you’ in ‘for you’ (*lakum*)—in this verse—and the verb ‘you can’ (*istata‘um*)—in the following verse—and in other places of this chapter refer to *thaqalān* even though *thaqalān* is grammatically dual, because while the jinn and humankind are two groups, they contain a multitude of individuals.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٢﴾

(55:32) *So which of your Lord’s bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

يَا مَعْشَرَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنسِ إِنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ أَنْ تَنْفُذُوا مِنْ أَقْطَارِ السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ فَانْفُذُوا لَا تَنْفُذُونَ إِلَّا بِسُلْطَانٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

(55:33) *O company of jinn and humans! If you can pass through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then do pass through. But you will not pass through except by an authority.*

Based on the context of this verse, this address appears to be something that will be spoken to the jinn and humankind on the Day of Resurrection. Furthermore, this address is intended as a challenge, in order to reveal their incapacity to do what it says.

The meaning of ‘can’ (*istiṭā‘a*) here is power (*qudra*), while ‘pass through the confines...’ means to escape through them, and ‘confines’ (*aqṭār*) is the plural of *quṭr*, which literally means a region or a quarter.

The meaning of the verse as a whole reads: ‘O company of jinn and humans—and the jinn are mentioned first because they are able to move faster than humans—if you are able to flee by passing through the regions of the heavens and the earth and thereby escape God’s dominion and avoid His punishment, then flee and do so!’

But you will not pass through except by an authority means you will not be able to pass through without some authority to do so, and you do not have any. ‘Authority’ (*sulṭān*) means existential power (*qudra wujūdiyya*), but it can also mean a conclusive argument or any kind of proof, and it may also mean sovereignty.

Some say that the meaning of *pass through* in this verse refers to penetrating the depths of the heavens and the earth with one’s knowledge. However,

it is clear that this meaning is incompatible with the context.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٤﴾

(55:34) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

يُرْسَلُ عَلَيْكُمَا شُوَاظٌ مِّن نَّارٍ وَنُحَاسٌ فَلَا تَنْتَصِرَانِ ﴿٣٥﴾

(55:35) *There will be unleashed upon you a flash of fire and a smoke; then you will not be able to help one another.*

According to Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 'flash' (*shuwāẓ*) refers to a flame without smoke. *Majma' al-Bayān* offers a similar meaning to this; that it is a green flame separated from fire. Meanwhile, the word used for 'smoke' in this verse is *nuḥās*. Al-Rāghib says: 'It is a flame without smoke,' and the meaning is clear.

When God says: *you will not be able to help one another*, He means you will not be able to come to one another's aid against the tribulation in which you find yourselves nor help one another escape. This is because the system of cause and effect in the hereafter operates differently from in this world, and there is no protection from God on that day.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٦﴾

(55:36) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

فَإِذَا انشَقَّتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ وَرْدَةً كَالدِّهَانِ ﴿٣٧﴾

(55:37) *When the sky is split open, and turns crimson like tanned leather.*

The meaning of this verse is clear.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٨﴾

(55:38) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْ ذَنْبِهِ إِنْسٌ وَلَا جَانٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

(55:39) *On that day neither humans will be questioned about their sins nor jinn.*

This verse and all the verses that follow it until the end of the chapter describe the process of judgement and recompense for one's deeds on the Day of Resurrection, and they describe the condition of the transgressors, those who feared the station of their Lord, and the ultimate outcomes of both groups.

Then the verse describes the swiftness of God's judgement, as He says elsewhere: *and God is swift at reckoning* (24:39).

The meaning of 'on that day' is the Day of Resurrection, while the word questioning here is used to denote the conventional sense of asking questions. However, the fact that this verse says they will not be questioned does not contradict what has been said elsewhere, namely: *stop them! For they must be questioned* (37:24) and: *by your Lord, We will question them all* (15:92). This is because the Day of Resurrection has a variety of stages; in some of them, people will be questioned; in others, some of their mouths will be sealed and their limbs will be made to speak instead; while in others still, some will be known by their mark.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٠﴾

(55:40) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

يُعْرِفُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ بِسِيمَاهُمْ فَيُؤْخَذُ بِالنَّوَاصِي وَالْأَقْدَامِ ﴿٥١﴾

(55:41) *The guilty will be recognized by their mark, so they will be seized by the forelocks and the feet.*

Based on the context, this verse appears to be the answer to an implicit question, namely: 'If they are not asked about their sins, then what will be done with them?' The verse answers by saying that these transgressors will be known by their mark. This is why this verse is not joined to the previous one with a connective such as 'and' but instead appears to start afresh. The meaning of 'their mark' is a sign that is visible upon their faces.

As for when God says: *they will be seized by the forelocks and the feet*, this follows on from what we have just said. 'Forelocks' (*nawāṣī*, sing. *nāsiya*) refers to the hair at the front of the head, while *feet* is a translation of *aqdām* (sing.

qadam). The phrase ‘by the forelocks’ occupies the grammatical position of the doer of the passive verb ‘seized.’

The meaning of this verse reads: ‘None will be asked about their sin. The guilty will be recognized by the visible marks upon their faces. Then, the guilty will be seized by their forelocks and feet and thrown into hellfire.’

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فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٢﴾

(55:42) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

هَذِهِ جَهَنَّمُ الَّتِي يُكَذِّبُ بِهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ يَطُوفُونَ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَ حَمِيمٍ
أَنْ ﴿٤٤﴾

(55:43–44) *This is the hell which the guilty would deny! They shall circuit between it and boiling hot water.*

These verses relate what will be said on the Day of Resurrection. In other words, it means: ‘On that day, they will be told: “This is the hell which the guilty would deny!”’

Al-Ṭabrisī says: ‘It might be the case that when God foretells that the guilty will be seized by their forelocks and feet, He addressed thee words to the Prophet, meaning: ‘*This is the hell which the guilty of your people would deny*, but they will soon enter it, so do not concern yourself with their fate.’

Boiling hot water is the translation of *ḥamīm ānin*, where *ḥamīm* denotes hot water and *ānin* means extreme hotness.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٥﴾

(55:45) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

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وَلِمَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ جَنَّاتٌ ﴿٤٦﴾

(55:46) *For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens.*

Now the Qur'an turns to the description of the felicitous and their condition in the hereafter, beginning with the fact that they ‘fear their Lord's standing.’ Standing is a translation of *maqām*, which is an infinitive verb attached

to its doer. Here, this signifies God standing over them with their deeds, which refers to His all-encompassing knowledge of what they did, His preserving of it, and His recompensing them according to it—as He says elsewhere, it is *He who stands over every soul with what it earns* (13:33).

It is also possible that *maqām* is a noun of place and that the possessive construct used here signifies that this standing belongs to God. In this case, it denotes God's standing and position in relation to His servants; that God is their Lord who looks after their affairs, and as part of looking after their affairs, He sent divine messengers who used their tongues to summon them to faith and good deeds. Another part of looking after their affairs is that He decreed that He would recompense them for whatever good or evil they did in this life and told them that His knowledge encompasses their deeds fully, that He is all-hearing of what they say, and that He is all-seeing of what they do, and that He is most-subtle, well-aware.

Fear (*khawf*) of God might mean fearing His punishment for disbelieving in Him or for disobeying Him, and the logical corollary of this would be that the worship of those who worship Him was intended to protect themselves from His punishment rather than being purely for His sake. This worship is that of a slave serving their master—they obey out of fear of chastisement. Equally, the goal of those who worship God out of desire for His reward is to gratify themselves rather than purely seeking His countenance. This worship is that of a merchant—as we find narrated in tradition, part of which we have already discussed previously.

However, the fear mentioned in this verse appears to be distinct from the kind of fear we have just mentioned, as the fear of punishment is not the same as the fear of God standing over His servant with what they have done or fearing His position in relation to His servant, as this is a special kind of feeling that belongs to those who harbour only humility and submissiveness before God's greatness and tremendousness, and who display their lowliness and abasement before His absolute might and majesty.

Worshipping God while fearing Him in this sense means humbling oneself before Him because God is the Lord of majesty and honour, not because you are afraid of His punishment or desirous of His reward, but because you are acting out of sincere and heartfelt devotion, seeking only His countenance. This is the meaning of the fear which God attributes to His noble angels, for angels do not sin and are therefore already safe from being punished for disobeying Him or contravening His ordinances: *They fear their Lord above them* (16:50).

From the above, it becomes clear that those who fear the standing of their Lord in this verse are the truly devoted (*ahl al-ikhlāṣ*) who submit themselves before His grandeur and worship Him for no other reason than the fact that He is God, not because they are afraid of His punishment or because they desire His reward. It is not unlikely that this group of people are the same that He refers to as ‘the Foremost Ones’ (*sābiqūn*) in the verses: ‘*you will be three groups... and the Foremost Ones are the Foremost Ones: they are the ones brought near*’ (56:7–11).

Why does God say ‘two gardens’ (*jannatān*)? Some have said it is because one of the gardens is a person’s home and the place in which they are visited by their loved ones, while the other is the home of their spouse and their servants. Others have said that these are the two gardens of a person’s palace: one on its inside and the other on its outside. Some have said that these two gardens are two homes between which an inhabitant of paradise moves back and forth and, in doing so, gains the full enjoyment of paradise. Still others have said that one of these gardens is a garden given in recompense for their beliefs and the other is a garden given in recompense for their good deeds. Some have said that one of the gardens is given for their doing of good deeds and the other is given for their avoidance of sins. Others have said that one of the gardens is corporeal and the other is spiritual. However, as should be obvious, none of these opinions have any evidence to support them.

It has also been suggested that one of these gardens is given as a reward (*thawāb*) and the other as a grace (*faḍl*), and this could be deduced from the verse: *There they will have whatever they wish, and with Us there is yet more* (50:35), as we have already discussed in our commentary on it.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٧﴾

(55:47) *So which of your Lord’s bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

ذَوَاتَا أَفْنَانٍ ﴿٥٨﴾

(55:48) *Both abounding in branches*

Branches is a translation of *afnān*, which can be read as either the plural of *fann* or the plural of *fanān*. In the first instance, *fann* signifies ‘species’ or ‘variety,’ in which case the verse means that these gardens abound in different varieties of fruit and the like thereof. In the latter instance, *fanān* refers to ‘a

supple and pliant branch,’ which would signify that these gardens are full of trees with supple branches.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٩﴾

(55:49) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِمَا عَيْنَانِ تَجْرِيَانِ ﴿٥٠﴾

(55:50) *In both of them will be two flowing springs'*

The fact that the phrase ‘two flowing springs’ is left indefinite and ambiguous serves to magnify the importance of these springs.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥١﴾

(55:51) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِمَا مِنْ كُلِّ فَاكِهَةٍ زَوْجَانِ ﴿٥٢﴾

(55:52) *In both of them will be two kinds of every fruit*

This means two types. Some have suggested this means one type that was known to people while they were alive in this world and a type they have never seen before during their worldly lives. Other interpretations have been offered as well. However, none of these have any evidence to support them.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٣﴾

(55:53) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

مُتَكِّينَ عَلَى فُرُشٍ بَطَائِنُهَا مِنْ إِسْتَبْرَقٍ وَجَنَى الْجَنَّتَيْنِ دَانٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(55:54) *Reclining on beds lined with green brocade. And the fruit of the two gardens will be near at hand.*

Beds is a translation of *furush* (sing. *firāsh*); *lined* is a translation of

baṭā'in (sing. *baṭāna*), literally signifying the interior or inside of something as opposed to its exterior (*zahāra*, pl. *zahā'ir*); *brocade* is a translation of *ista-braq*, meaning thick silk. According to *Majma' al-bayān*, this verse mentions the interior but not the exterior of these beds because the fact that they have an interior indicates that they must also have an exterior, and if the interior is made with brocade, then the exterior must be made of something even more luxurious.

Fruit is a translation of *janā*, signifying fruit that has been harvested. *Near at hand* is a translation of *dānin*, which is the active participle of *danuww*, meaning close at hand. In other words, the fruit harvested from the two gardens will be close by.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٥﴾

(55:55) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِنَّ قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ لَمْ يَطْمِثْهُنَّ إِنْسٌ قَبْلَهُمْ وَلَا جَانٌّ ﴿٥٦﴾

(55:56) *In them are maidens of restrained glances, whom no human has touched before, nor jinn.*

The pronoun *hinna* (feminine plural) is used in the phrase 'in them' (*fi hinna*) to refer to these beds. However, it could also refer to the gardens of paradise, as each and every one of God's friends has two of them. *Tarf* literally means 'eyelid' and their being 'of restrained glances' is that they are satisfied with their spouses and do not desire anyone else.

Whom no human has touched before, nor jinn means that they have never been married or had intercourse with anyone before their spouses in paradise.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٧﴾

(55:57) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

كَأَنَّهُنَّ الْيَاقُوتُ وَالْمَرْجَانُ ﴿٥٨﴾

(55:58) *As though they were rubies and corals*

Meaning in their purity of their color, splendor, and brightness.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٩﴾

(55:59) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

هَلْ جَزَاءُ الْإِحْسَانِ إِلَّا الْإِحْسَانُ ﴿٦٠﴾

(55:60) *Is the requital of goodness anything but goodness?*

This is a rhetorical question that is intended to illustrate why God has given each of the inhabitants of paradise two gardens filled with all manner of blessings and bounties. It shows that God grants them this goodness as a recompense for the goodness they did because they feared the standing of their Lord.

This verse shows that whatever they have been given of paradise and its blessings is a recompense for their deeds. As for what is gleaned from other verses, namely that God grants them blessings in excess (*fadl*) of their just desserts, this is not addressed in the present verse unless we were to say that goodness (*ihsān*) is only complete if it exceeds the goodness done by the doer of good. In this case, *goodness* in the phrase *but goodness* automatically includes this excess.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦١﴾

(55:61) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

وَمِنْ دُونِهِمَا جَنَّتَانِ ﴿٦٢﴾

(55:62) *Beneath these two, there will be two other gardens.*

The phrase *these two* refers to the two gardens already described in the above verses of this chapter. 'Beneath these two' (*min dūnihimā*) means at a lower level to them and at a lesser degree of divine grace and nobility, even if they are similar to the two aforementioned gardens in terms of their blessings and bounties. As we have already mentioned, the first pair of gardens were for the people of devotion and sincerity to God who feared the standing of their Lord. Therefore, the two gardens referenced in this verse are for believers of a lower rank, for example those who worshipped God out of fear of hell or out

of desire for paradise, and these are known as the Companions of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*).

It is said that ‘beneath these two’ (*min dūnihimā*) means ‘close to them,’ in which case the context suggests that these two gardens also belong to the owners of the two gardens described above. In fact, some have claimed that these two gardens are actually superior to the ones just mentioned and that the qualities assigned to them are more praiseworthy.

If you ponder on what we presented above regarding the meaning of *fear the station of his Lord* and the verses showing the people of paradise are of two varieties— Those Brought Near (*al-muqarrabūn*), who are the people of devotion and sincerity, and the Companions of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*)—you will see the strength of our interpretation of these verses.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٣﴾

(55:63) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

مُدْهَامَّتَانِ ﴿٦٤﴾

(55:64) *Dark green*

This denotes a deep green color, approaching black, which reflects the verdancy of the trees.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٥﴾

(55:65) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِمَا عَيْنَانِ نَضَّاخَتَانِ ﴿٦٦﴾

(55:66) *In both of them will be two gushing springs*

Meaning, they rush forth forcefully from their source.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٧﴾

(55:67) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِمَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَنَخْلٌ وَرُمَّانٌ ﴿٦٨﴾

(55:68) *'In both of them will be fruits, date palms and pomegranates.'*

The words 'fruits' and 'pomegranates' mean 'fruit trees' and 'pomegranate trees,' as indicating by the use of the word *nakhl* ('date palm,' rather than 'date').

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٩﴾

(55:69) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِنَّ خَيْرَاتٌ حِسَانٌ ﴿٧٠﴾

(55:70) *In them are maidens good and lovely*

The use of the plural pronoun *hinna* (instead of the dual, *humā*) in *them* (fī hinna) refers to the gardens insofar as these two gardens are one pair among many. Some have said the plural reflects the fact that this refers to all four gardens, while others have said that it refers to the fruit and pomegranate trees and date palms.

The word *khayr* (good) is usually used for abstract ideas, while *hasan* ('lovely') tends to be used for tangible forms. Therefore, referring to these maidens as *khayrāt ḥisān* ('good and lovely') means that they are beautiful in their manners and beautiful in their appearance.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧١﴾

(55:71) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

حُورٌ مَّقْصُورَاتٌ فِي الْخِيَامِ ﴿٧٢﴾

(55:72) *Houris secluded in pavilions*

Khayām (pavilions) is the plural of *khayma* (tent) and denotes an encampment. The fact that the houris are described as 'secluded' (*maqṣūrāt*) indicates that they are chaste and not licentious; none have access to them save their

partners.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٣﴾

(55:73) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

لَمْ يَطْمِثْهُنَّ إِنْسٌ قَبْلَهُمْ وَلَا جَانٌّ ﴿٧٤﴾

(55:74) *Whom no human has touched before, nor jinn*

The meaning of this has already been discussed, above.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٥﴾

(55:75) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

مُتَّكِئِينَ عَلَى رَفْرَفٍ خُضِرٍ وَعَبَقَرِيٍّ حِسَانٍ ﴿٧٦﴾

(55:76) *Reclining on green cushions and lovely carpets*

In the dictionary *al-Sihāḥ*, we read: '*Rafrāf* (translated as 'cushions') is a green fabric used for seating.' It is also said that *rafrāf* refers to pillows, and there are other possible meanings offered besides these. *Khudr* (green) is the plural of *akhḍar* and is an adjective for *rafrāf*. As for '*abqarī* (translated as 'carpets'), it is said to mean a carpet, a pile rug, woven fabric, or brocade.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٧﴾

(55:77) *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*

See the explanation of verse 13.

تَبَارَكَ اسْمُ رَبِّكَ ذِي الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٧٨﴾

(55:78) *Blessed is the name of your Lord, the Lord of majesty and honour!*

This verse praises God for the blessings and bounties with which He has filled the two creations of this world and the hereafter, and the boons sent that

come down from His divine presence through His all-encompassing mercy. From the above, it is clear that the ‘name’ (*ism*) meant here is All-beneficent (*al-Raḥmān*), with which this chapter begins. ‘Blessed’ (*tabārūk*) means to abound in good things and to overflow with blessings.

Therefore, *Blessed is the Name of your Lord* means ‘Blessed is God, who is named the All-beneficent, for His abundant blessings.’

And *the Lord of majesty and honour* refers to the fact He is also known by the Beautiful Names, which stem from His divine attributes that describe His beauty and His majesty. This is because the attributes of an agent are visible in their actions and cause those actions. In this way, these attributes are bound to the agent through the act. Hence, God created the creation and instituted the cosmic order because He is the originator (*badīʿ*), the creator (*khāliq*), and the initiator (*mubdiʿ*); and He did all of this proficiently because He is all-knowing (*ʿalīm*) and most-wise (*ḥakīm*). He requites the obedient with good things because He is loving (*wadūd*), appreciative (*shakūr*), forgiving (*ghafūr*), and merciful (*raḥīm*), while he punishes the sinners because He is the avenger (*muntaqim*) and severe in punishment (*shadīd al-ʿiqāb*).

Therefore, the Lord—who is praised for His all-encompassing mercy—is described as *the Lord of majesty and honour* in order to highlight His Beautiful Names (*asmāʾ al-ḥusnāʾ*) and lofty attributes (*ṣifāt al-ʿulyāʾ*) and the fact that these play a role in the sending down of blessings and good things from Him, and that the gifts and bounties He bestows emanate from these beautiful names and lofty attributes.

Examining Narrations

- (1) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read a report which says: ‘He will surround the creation with the angels and with a tongue of flame, then they will be told: “*O company of jinn and humans... there will be unleashed upon you a flash of fire*”’ (55:33).

Author’s comments: A tradition with the same meaning has also been narrated from Masʿada b. Sadaqa, from Kulayb, from Abī ʿAbd Allāh (Imām al-Ṣādiq).

- (2) In *al-Kāfi*, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain of narrators leading to Dāwūd al-Raqqī, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh (Imām al-Ṣādiq), concerning the verse: ‘*For him who fears his Lord’s standing will be two gardens*’ (55:46). He says: ‘Whoever knows that God sees them, hears what they say, and knows whatever they do, whether good or evil, and that knowledge prevents them from doing immoral deeds, that

is someone who fears their Lord's standing and forbids themselves from following desire.'

- (3) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Abī Shayba, Aḥmad, Ibn Manīʿ, and al-Ḥakīm in *Nawādir al-uṣūl*, and al-Nasāʾī, al-Bazzār, Abū Yaʿlā, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Ṭabarānī, and Ibn Mardawayh all narrate the following account from Ibn Abī Dardā': The Prophet recited the verse: "*For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens,*" and I asked: "Even if they fornicate or steal, O Messenger of God?" The Prophet recited again: "*For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens,*" I asked again: "Even if they fornicate or steal?" He said: "Yes, however much Abū Dardā' might disagree!"

Author's comments: There is an issue with this narration, for fear (*khawf*) of God's standing is incompatible with the commission of these mortal sins. In fact, a tradition that runs directly contrary to this narration is transmitted from the very same Abū al-Dardā' in *al-Durr al-manthūr*. Ibn Jarīr and Ibn al-Mundhir relate from Yasār, a freedman of Mu'āwiya's family, from Abū al-Dardā', concerning the verse '*For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens.*' He said: 'Someone asked: "O Abū al-Dardā'! Even if they fornicate and steal?" He said: "Someone who fears the standing of their Lord does not fornicate and they do not steal."'

- (4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse '*of restrained glances*' (55:56), we read: 'Gazes are restrained from the houris because of the brilliance of their luminance.'
- (5) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Ja'far b. Muḥammad, from his father, from his grandfather, from the Prophet, concerning the verse '*of restrained glances*': 'They do not look except to their spouses.'
- (6) In *Majma' al-Bayān*, regarding the verse '*As though they were rubies and corals*' (55:58), there is a tradition which states that the marrow of a damsel of paradise's leg can be seen beneath seventy layers of silk.

Author's comments: There are a number of narrations that convey a similar meaning.

- (7) In *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, with a chain of narration going back to 'Alī b. Sālim, who said: 'I heard Abū 'Abd Allāh say: "There is a verse in the Book of God that decides every judgement." I said: "What is it?" He said: "God's saying: '*Is the requital of goodness anything but goodness?*' (55:60). It applies to the disbeliever and the believer, the virtuous and

the wicked. Whoever does good to another should be requited with goodness, but to requite goodness does not mean to merely do what the other person has done, for if you do as they did, then they have done more than you by virtue of going first.”

- (8) And in *Majma‘ al-bayān*, regarding the verse ‘*Is the requital of goodness anything but goodness?*’, there is a narration in which Anas b. Mālik says: ‘The Messenger of God recited this verse and said: “Do you know what your Lord says?” The people said: “God and His Messenger know better!” He said: “Surely your Lord says: ‘Is the recompense of those We have blessed with divine unity (*tawḥīd*) anything but paradise?’”’
- (9) And in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding the same verse, we read: ‘Is the recompense of those I have blessed with knowledge (*ma‘rifa*) anything but paradise?’

Author’s comments: The narration is transmitted from the Prophet and the Imams of the Prophet’s Family and in the *Tawḥīd* it is traced to Ja‘far b. Muḥammad, from his forefathers, from ‘Alī, from the Prophet. It is worded thus: ‘Surely God almighty says: “The reward of those I have blessed with divine unity is nothing but paradise.”’ In *Ilal al-sharā‘i* it is traced back to al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī from the Prophet, and it is worded as follows: ‘Is the recompense of the one who says “there is no god but God” anything but paradise?’

The narration appears with a variety of wordings in *al-Durr al-manthūr* via different chains of narration from the Prophet, but all of them reproduce the wording of ‘those I have blessed,’ which shows that even the good done by the servant is, in reality, another form of good done by God for them.

- (10) In *Majma‘ al-bayān*, concerning the verse ‘*Beneath these two, there will be two other gardens,*’ it is narrated from al-‘Alā’ b. Sayyāba, who told Abū ‘Abd Allāh: ‘People are amazed by our belief that people will come out of hell and enter paradise, and they ask us: “Will these inmates of hell really be in the company of God’s friends in paradise?”’ He said: ‘O ‘Alī, God says: “*Beneath these two, there will be two other gardens.*” So they will not be with God’s friends.’
- (11) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Abū Mūsā from the Prophet, concerning the verses: ‘*For him who fears his Lord’s standing will be two gardens*’ and ‘*Beneath these two, there will be two other gardens,*’ that he said: ‘Two gardens of gold for Those Brought Near, and two gardens of greenery for the Companions of the Right.’

Author's comments: These two narrations above confirm what we have said previously about these verses.

- (12) Also in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Abū Ayyūb: 'I asked the Prophet about the verse: "Dark green" (55:64) and he said: "Two verdant gardens."'
- (13) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, with a chain of narrators going back to Yūnus b. Zibyan, from Abū 'Abd Allāh, concerning the verse: *two gushing springs* (55:66), he said: 'Flowing copiously.'
- (14) And also in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse *In them are maidens good and lovely*, (55:70) he says: 'Maidens who sprout like plants around the pool of Kawthar; whenever one of them is picked, another sprouts in her place.'
- (15) In *Majma' al-bayān*, concerning the verse *In them are maidens good and lovely*, we read: 'Meaning women of good manners and beautiful faces,' narrated by Umm Salama from the Prophet.
- (16) And in *Man lā yaḥḍuruh al-faqīh*, it is narrated from al-Ṣādiq: 'Good and lovely women of this world, and they are even more beautiful than the houris.'
- (17) In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, it is narrated with a chain going back to al-Ḥalabī: 'I asked Abū 'Abd Allāh about God's saying *In them are maidens good and lovely*, and he told me: "They are the righteous believing women with spiritual knowledge."'

Author's comments: Based on the context of the verse, there is some ambiguity about how the meaning of these two narrations can be reconciled with it.

~ End of Chapter 55 ~